



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

REGION IX

75 Hawthorne Street

San Francisco, CA 94105-3901

April 28, 2009

Ms. Priscilla Franco
Mount Shasta Ranger Station
204 W. Alma Street
Mt. Shasta, CA 96067

Subject: Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement for the Pilgrim Vegetation Management Project, Shasta-McCloud Management Unit, Shasta-Trinity National Forest, Siskiyou County, California (CEQ # 20090070)

Dear Ms. Franco:

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has reviewed the above-referenced document pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations (40 CFR Parts 1500-1508), and Section 309 of the Clean Air Act.

EPA submitted comments to the U.S. Forest Service (Forest Service) on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for this project on August 3, 2006. Unfortunately, our comments were not received by the Forest Service by the August 7, 2006 comment due date. Consequently, EPA's comments were not addressed in the "*Response to Comments*" in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS). EPA submitted comments on the FEIS on August 6, 2007. In that letter, EPA reiterated issues identified in our DEIS comment letter and offered recommendations for the Record of Decision (ROD). Our comments on the FEIS were not addressed nor were our recommendations incorporated in the ROD.

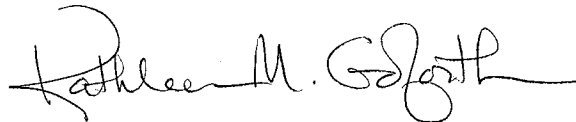
The Forest Service has prepared the Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (DSEIS) in response to a recent court ruling¹ that identifies specific issues requiring additional analysis and supplemental information. Specifically, this DSEIS addresses the issue of habitat monitoring, and documents changes made within the Project Level Management Indicator Assemblage Report (Appendix L). Species that were examined in greater detail in the DSEIS include the Mule Deer and the Red-Breasted Nuthatch. The purpose and need for action associated with the Pilgrim Vegetation Management Plan, as well as the alternatives analysis, remain the same as described in the FEIS.

¹ Conservation Congress and Klamath Forest Alliance v. United States Forest Service, No. Civ. S-07-2764 LKK/KJM (United States District Court for the Eastern District of California, May 13, 2008).

Based on our review, we have rated the DSEIS for the Pilgrim Vegetation Management Project as Environmental Concerns – Insufficient Information (EC-2). See enclosed “Summary of Rating Definitions”. EPA supports the Forest Service’s effort to address unhealthy timber stands and reduce high fuel loads; however, we remain concerned about the issues we raised previously that were not addressed. We recommend that the Forest Service address the following topics in greater detail in the Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (FSEIS): 1) minimizing Sporax exposure to human and non-target species, 2) avoidance and minimization of adverse cumulative effects to snag-dependent and late-successional forest species, and 3) road-related sedimentation and erosion problems. Our detailed comments are enclosed.

We appreciate the opportunity to review this DSEIS, and request a copy of the FSEIS or subsequent documentation when it becomes available. If you have any questions, please call me at (415) 972-3521, or have your staff contact Ann McPherson at (415) 972-3545 or mcpherson.ann@epa.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Kathleen M. Goforth". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Kathleen" and last name "Goforth" clearly legible.

Kathleen M. Goforth, Manager
Environmental Review Office

Enclosures: Summary of Rating Definitions
EPA Detailed Comments

cc: J. Sharon Heywood, Forest Supervisor, Shasta-Trinity National Forest

SUMMARY OF EPA RATING DEFINITIONS ¹

This rating system was developed as a means to summarize EPA's level of concern with a proposed action. The ratings are a combination of alphabetical categories for evaluation of the environmental impacts of the proposal and numerical categories for evaluation of the adequacy of the EIS.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS OF THE ACTION

"LO" (Lack of Objections)

The EPA review has not identified any potential environmental impacts requiring substantive changes to the proposal. The review may have disclosed opportunities for application of mitigation measures that could be accomplished with no more than minor changes to the proposal.

"EC" (Environmental Concerns)

The EPA review has identified environmental impacts that should be avoided in order to fully protect the environment. Corrective measures may require changes to the preferred alternative or application of mitigation measures that can reduce the environmental impact. EPA would like to work with the lead agency to reduce these impacts.

"EO" (Environmental Objections)

The EPA review has identified significant environmental impact that must be avoided in order to provide adequate protection for the environment. Corrective measures may require substantial changes to the preferred alternative or consideration of some other project alternative (including the no action alternative or a new alternative). EPA intends to work with the lead agency to reduce these impacts.

"EU" (Environmentally Unsatisfactory)

The EPA review has identified adverse environmental impacts that are of sufficient magnitude that they are unsatisfactory from the standpoint of public health or welfare or environmental quality. EPA intends to work with the lead agency to reduce these impacts. If the potentially unsatisfactory impacts are not corrected at the final EIS stage, this proposal will be recommended for referral to the CEQ.

ADEQUACY OF THE IMPACT STATEMENT

"Category 1" (Adequate)

EPA believes the draft EIS adequately sets forth the environmental impact(s) of the preferred alternative and those of the alternatives reasonably available to the project or action. No further analysis or data collection is necessary, but the reviewer may suggest the addition of clarifying language or information.

"Category 2" (Insufficient Information)

The draft EIS does not contain sufficient information for EPA to fully assess environmental impacts that should be avoided in order to fully protect the environment, or the EPA reviewer has identified new reasonably available alternatives that are within the spectrum of alternatives analyzed in the draft EIS, which could reduce the environmental impacts of the action. The identified additional information, data, analyses, or discussion should be included in the final EIS.

"Category 3" (Inadequate)

EPA does not believe that the draft EIS adequately assesses potentially significant environmental impacts of the action, or the EPA reviewer has identified new, reasonably available alternatives that are outside of the spectrum of alternatives analyzed in the draft EIS, which should be analyzed in order to reduce the potentially significant environmental impacts. EPA believes that the identified additional information, data, analyses, or discussions are of such a magnitude that they should have full public review at a draft stage. EPA does not believe that the draft EIS is adequate for the purposes of the NEPA and/or Section 309 review, and thus should be formally revised and made available for public comment in a supplemental or revised draft EIS. On the basis of the potential significant impacts involved, this proposal could be a candidate for referral to the CEQ.

¹ From EPA Manual 1640, Policy and Procedures for the Review of Federal Actions Impacting the Environment.

**EPA DETAILED COMMENTS ON THE DRAFT SUPPLEMENTAL ENVIRONMENTAL
IMPACT STATEMENT (DSEIS) FOR THE PILGRIM VEGETATION MANAGEMENT
PROJECT, SISKIYOU COUNTY, CALIFORNIA, APRIL 28, 2009**

Detailed Comments

Minimize exposure of humans and non-target species to Sporax.

In order to control the spread of annosum root disease, Sporax, a fungicide, will be applied to all large stumps 14 inches and larger within four hours of being cut (FEIS—pg. 17). The Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) indicates that there are potential risks to humans and the environment from the application of Sporax. For example, Sporax is highly toxic to the eye and absorbed through abraded skin (FEIS—pg. 41). In addition, the FEIS states that direct consumption of a treated tree stump, for instance, by a child could result in non-lethal but toxic effects such as vomiting and diarrhea (FEIS—Appendix J: Borax Report for Pilgrim Project, pg. J-11). There may also be ecological risk to non-target fungi, insects, and amphibians (FEIS—Appendix J; pg. J-13).

EPA is concerned about the potential human and environmental exposure associated with the application of Sporax. The FEIS notes that the project area contains the Pilgrim Creek Snowmobile Park and is used by the public for deer hunting, mushroom gathering, firewood cutting, and dispersed camping (pg. 108). We understand that applications would follow all federal and state rules and regulations—including worker protection, spill prevention and remediation, and storage requirements. Nonetheless, EPA recommends that the Forest Service address this topic in greater detail in the Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (FSEIS).

Recommendation:

Due to widespread public use in the project area, EPA recommends that the FSEIS/Record of Decision (ROD) describe measures and project commitments to notify and inform public users and local communities of Sporax application sites and the presence of treated stumps. We encourage the Forest Service to implement protective measures regarding Sporax application and include them in Appendix E: Best Management Practices.

Avoid and minimize adverse cumulative effects to snag-dependent and late-successional forest species.

The proposed action would remove diseased trees that have chlorotic foliage, ragged and fading crowns, poor needle retention, and/or evidence of successful insect attacks. Due to extensive tree mortality from root disease and insects, the 15% green tree retention standard for snag-dependent species and the management goal of 60% canopy closure for late-successional forest species may not be met in stands with few healthy or live overstory pine trees (FEIS—pg. 19).

Recommendation:

EPA recommends the FSEIS/ROD commit to meeting the 15% green tree retention standard and 60% canopy closure goal, if sufficient healthy trees are available within the treatment stands. While it may not be feasible to meet the abovementioned standards for the entire area, we recommend meeting them to the maximum extent possible

Utilize the road management actions to address identified road-related sedimentation and erosion problems.

The FEIS states that local road maintenance needs and related issues will be addressed for roads affected by this project (FEIS—pg. 102); however, the FEIS does not describe measures to address recognized road-related concerns for Swamp Creek, Dry Creek, and Road 41N44Y (FEIS—pg. 95 and Appendix D: Road Actions, pg. D-1).

Recommendation:

We encourage the Forest Service to include road improvements in the project design to address identified resource problems. The FSEIS/ROD should include a list of road-related sedimentation, erosion, and water quality impacts within the project area and describe how project actions, such as the proposal to close 9 miles and decommission 2.1 miles of roads in the project area (FEIS—pgs. 23, 100) will address these problems. Once these impacts have been identified and addressed, we recommend the FSEIS/ROD commit to rapid implementation of these road improvements. The FSEIS/ROD should also commit to minimizing erosion caused by road construction and road decommissioning by planting native species which can help minimize erosion.